

**CITY OF SEATTLE  
OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK**

**CITIZENS' INITIATIVE PETITION GUIDE**  
**An Information Resource for Citizens**

**June 2012**

This document is provided to the members of the public for **informational and guidance purposes only**. Persons desiring to become involved in the citizen initiative petition process should refer to the City Charter and the Seattle Municipal Code for specific requirements.

Questions or requests for additional information should be directed to the City Clerk:  
**clerk@seattle.gov** or **600 4th Avenue Fl. 3, PO Box 94728, Seattle, WA 98124-4728** or **(206) 684-8344**.

You may also want to consult with a private attorney to seek legal advice. There is case law that exempts some subjects from the initiative process. See the [Initiative and Referendum Guide for Washington City and Charter Counties](#) published by Municipal Research and Services Center of Washington.

**Step 1**

**RESOURCES:**

Familiarize yourself with the following documents which contain specific information about the requirements for a citizen initiative petition; copies of these documents are available from the Office of the City Clerk:

- Seattle City Charter, Article IV, Section 1
- Seattle Municipal Code (SMC) Chapters 2.08 and 2.16
- City Clerk Rule 00-01
- Citizens' Initiative Petition Guide (this document)

You may also want to consult the Revised Code of Washington (RCW).

**Step 2**

**FILING:**

A paper copy and an electronic copy of your proposed initiative petition, including the text of the proposed initiative and a letter of transmittal containing the name, address, and phone number of the contact person, must first be filed with the City Clerk. The Clerk will assign the next initiative number from the initiative petition register to your initiative petition.

**Step 3**

**APPROVAL / REJECTION:**

The City Clerk reviews your proposed initiative and petition for approval or rejection as to form (SMC 2.08.010). The Clerk also sends your proposed initiative to the City Attorney's office requesting that office to prepare a ballot title.

**The City Clerk will check for the following:**

- ☐ Does the petition contain the name, address and phone number of petitioner or contact person?
- ☐ Is the petition typewritten and in a readable font?
- ☐ Is the proposed ordinance in ordinance format?
- ☐ Is the petition printed on single sheets of paper of good writing quality?
- ☐ Are the petition pages at least 8 ½" wide and 11" long, and not larger than 11" wide and 17" long?
- ☐ Is there a top margin of at least 1" ?
- ☐ Are the signature lines numbered, and are there not more than 20 signatures per page?
- ☐ Are the printed words legible?
- ☐ Do the petition pages contain the warning as required by SMC 2.08.040A, and the form as required by SMC 2.08.040B?
- ☐ Is the complete text of the whole ordinance, or the section or part in question, included on the petition form?
- ☐ Is there an electronic copy (word processing or plain text file) of the ordinance included?
- ☐ Is the number of signature lines on a page limited to no more than 20?

You will be notified of approval or rejection of your proposed initiative within five days after the date you filed it with the City Clerk. You will receive a letter and a phone call from the City Clerk, informing you of the approval or rejection of the initiative as to form, and if approved, advising you of the ballot title.

If your proposed initiative is not approved and you wish to continue the process, you must resubmit the proposal until it is approved.

If you do not concur with the prepared ballot title, you may request to confer with the City Attorney's representative and the City Clerk.

If you request a change in the original document filed, that change will be considered a new filing. (Refer to Step 2 )

**Step 4**

**PROCURING SIGNATURES:**

You will have 180 days to collect the required number of signatures. Begin counting on the day after the date of the letter notifying you of the approved ballot title. Include Saturdays, Sundays and holidays in the count.

*Example: Petition approved on Friday, and petitioner notified on the same day. Start counting 180 days starting with Saturday as Day One.*

Ten percent of the total votes cast for mayor at the last Mayoral election is the number of registered voter signatures needed to validate the initiative.

*Example: 2009 Mayoral race - 206,286 votes cast, so until the next Mayoral election, 20,629 valid signatures of registered Seattle voters will be required to qualify an initiative.*

## Step 5

### SIGNATURE SUBMITTAL

On or before the 180th day following filing of your petition, if you believe you have collected the required number of signatures you may submit the signed petitions to the City Clerk's Office. It is a good idea to contact the City Clerk as the deadline approaches and schedule an appointment for the submission of the petitions.

When you bring in the petitions, you will be requested to estimate the number of signatures and number of petition pages. The pages should be numbered in sequence, beginning with 1 or 001, etc., in the upper right corner of each sheet.

King County Records and Elections Division will verify the validity of the signatures and count them to determine sufficiency. Refer to Step 4 regarding the percentage formula used to determine the number of valid signatures required.

## Step 6

### ADDITIONAL 20 DAYS:

The City Charter provides, under specific circumstances, for an additional 20 days for signature procurement.

For any particular petition drive, the additional 20 day period shall begin either:

1. Immediately after the expiration of the initial 180 day period (i.e. the 181<sup>st</sup> day); or
2. On the day you are provided with the notice of insufficiency.

In effect, you have the choice of:

1. Continuing to gather signatures while the initial petitions are being verified: or,
2. Waiting until the initial petitions are verified and the petitioner is notified that the petitions did (or did not) have sufficient verified signatures; if after the additional 20 days, there are still not sufficient verified signatures for your measure to qualify for a ballot, you will be notified by mail.

You will be required to notify the City Clerk, in writing, which option, if any, you will choose.

Step 7

REFERRAL TO COUNCIL

If there are enough verified signatures, your proposed initiative will be submitted to the City Clerk for introduction and referral to City Council at a regular Full Council meeting held within 20 days from the date King County issues a sufficiency report.

Step 8

COUNCIL ACTION

The Council has up to 45 days after introduction to take action on the proposed ordinance. Actions available to Council are:

1. Pass the initiative (as an ordinance) ;
2. Reject it; or
3. Fail to act upon it; or
4. Pass a different measure dealing with same subject.

PASSAGE OF INITIATIVE

If the Council passes the initiative as an ordinance, it automatically becomes city law upon the effective date of the ordinance, usually 30 days after the Mayor signs it, unless the ordinance specifies a different effective date.

REJECTION OF INITIATIVE

If the Council votes to reject the proposed initiative, the initiative then goes before the voters at the next regularly scheduled election, or an earlier election if the Council so chooses.

FAILURE OF COUNCIL TO ACT:

If the Council does not act upon the initiative within 45 days from the date it was introduced to them, it automatically goes before the voters at the next regularly scheduled election, or an earlier election if the Council so chooses.

PASSAGE OF DIFFERENT MEASURE

The Council may choose to pass a different measure dealing with the same subject, in which case both measures will go before the voters at the next regularly scheduled election, or an earlier election if the Council so chooses.

Step 9

PLACING MEASURE ON THE BALLOT

The Council will pass a bill or adopt a resolution authorizing King County Elections to place the initiative measure on the ballot for a forthcoming election.

As of January 1, 2012, the Revised Code of Washington 29A.04.330 requires that legislation authorizing a measure for a February or April election ballot be submitted to King County least 46 days before the respective election date.

Legislation authorizing a measure for the primary election ballot must be submitted to King County Elections no later than the Friday immediately before the first day of regular candidate filing.

Legislation authorizing a measure on the general election ballot must be submitted to King County Elections no later than the day of the primary election date.

This schedule plays an important role in the decision determining the election in which the measure will be placed on the ballot.

Step 10

ELECTION RESULTS:

Following the election, written notification will be sent to the City Clerk from King County as to the outcome of the vote count.

If the initiative was not passed, the matter is dead;

If the initiative was passed by the voters, it becomes law upon proclamation of the Mayor (within five days after certification of the election).